


**on diverging**

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# on diverging

by [LuckyMagicBelle](#)

## Summary

Various loops that aren't canon to *on temporizing*.

AKA the place where I write loop ideas that I really like but can't put in *on temporizing* for plot reasons.

If you haven't read *on temporizing*, this won't make sense to you.

## i.

### Chapter Summary

Philza takes Tommy and Dream to meet his wife, the Goddess of Death. Unfortunately this requires temporarily “dying”. Even more unfortunately, the Butcher Army and Technoblade are the ones who find their bodies.

Technoblade knows what's happening. The Butcher Army does not. This leads to some miscommunication.

### Chapter Notes

Why it's not canon: Mumza (being both very powerful and outside of the timeline) would greatly interfere with the plot I have planned. Also the mechanics of loopers not going to Limbo. But I loved the idea so much I wrote it anyway--

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*(credit to Ayrn and ori)*

“I’m not sure about this.”

“Oh come oooooon, Dream,” Tommy groaned. “It’s just one visit to the goddess of death. No big deal.”

“Seeing as we’ve intruded on her domain several times, I would say it is a *very big deal*,” Dream stressed. “She’s a *goddess*. Things she does might have *permanent consequences*.”

“No need to worry,” Philza assured the two of them. “Kristin has a very positive impression of both of you, I promise. She won’t smite you.”

“That isn’t as reassuring as you think it is.”

“Oh, and one more thing,” Philza added, cheerily ignoring Dream. “We’re gonna have to be dead for this.”

Both loopers did a double take. “Waitwaitwait,” Tommy spluttered, scrambling back when Philza pulled out a very pointy knife. “*WAIT--*”

“Calm down, mate. This is a special dagger, see?” Philza tapped the runes carved into the handle. “Kristin put her magic into this. Our bodies’ll be put into temporary stasis while our

souls visit her domain."

Dream eyed the weapon warily. "What, so you just. . . stab us?"

"Slicing the neck's a bit cleaner. Don't worry, it doesn't hurt. Your soul leaves your body before your brain really processes the *dying* part."

The two loopers exchanged glances. "Cool," Tommy said. "I, uh, I can go first?"

"Great!" Phil beamed. Tommy sent one last *if-shit-goes-down-avenge-me* look at Dream and stepped forward.

Dream shut his eyes. He heard a quiet gurgle, then a thud. "There we go," Philza murmured. "You okay there, Dream?"

"Yes, uh." Dream didn't open his eyes. "Sorry. Just." He gestured vaguely in the direction of where Tommy had been standing.

"Ah." Philza's voice gained a distinctly sympathetic tone. "Sorry, mate. I forgot how much that tends to freak people out. Techno took a while to get used to it too."

"Yeah. Uh. Can I just. Not open my eyes for this?"

"That's fine." Philza's footsteps circled around to his back. "Relax, Dream. This won't hurt at all."

There was a strange sensation in his throat, and then nothing at all.

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"Is this really necessary?"

"You're all traitors to L'Manberg," Tubbo said grimly. "We have to bring you to justice."

"I'm not seein' any justice in this," Technoblade pointed out. "I mean, I'm just mindin' my own business, and then you lot come here and ambush me when I'm on the way back from vacation. Not very justice-like of you."

"Where's Tommy, Technoblade?"

"With Dream and Phil."

"And where are Dream and Philza?"

"At my house."

"And where is your house?"

“Why would I tell you that?”

Fundy stepped forward and plucked his communicator off his belt before Technoblade had time to register the theft. “He might have sent the coordinates to someone. Let me check his message history.”

Technoblade had, in fact, sent the coordinates to Dream. Unfortunately, trying to take his communicator back would result in yet another 4v1, which - given that the Butcher Army had already forced him to disarm himself - wouldn’t end in his favor. Besides, the Butcher Army was essentially leading him to *reinforcements*. If they wanted to bring his allies into the equation, it was their funeral.

“This is an invasion of privacy,” he protested halfheartedly. Ranboo winced, but as expected, none of the other three listened to him.

A minute later, Fundy let out a victorious cry. “Found it! Follow me, I’ll lead us there.”

“No funny business,” Quackity warned Technoblade. He was still sitting astride Technoblade’s horse, his axe in hand. The piglin hybrid silently vowed to get revenge. Nobody took Carl hostage and got away with it.

The journey passed in stifling silence. When the house came into view, Quackity dismounted and released Carl into the stables. He then took the lead, shifting to the front of the entourage and heading up Technoblade’s porch. The rest of the Butcher Army followed, herding Technoblade with them with a clear unwillingness to let him out of their grasp. Paranoid bunch, weren’t they?

Quackity knocked. “Philza! Dream! Tommy! We know you’re in there! Come out and Technoblade won’t get hurt!”

“Bruhhh,” Technoblade deadpanned. “A hostage plot? Really?”

Quackity ignored him. “You have five seconds! Five! Four! Three! Two! One!”

When he’d reached the end of the countdown and there was still no response from inside, he motioned for the others to get back. He pulled out his axe and unceremoniously kicked down the door, then took one step inside and froze. “Oh,” he choked out. “Oh. Oh *fuck*. ”

Technoblade peered over his shoulder. Dream and Tommy were laid out on the ground, hands folded across their stomachs and identical slits across their throats. Phil himself was slumped against the wall a few feet away, face hidden behind a curtain of golden hair. A bloody dagger lay on the floor beside him.

Very importantly, the dagger was *the dagger* - the ornate, almost decorative knife Philza carried everywhere. Furthermore, for mortal wounds, there wasn’t a lot of blood. Looks like Philza had just decided to introduce Dream and Tommy to his wife.

“Really, Phil,” Technoblade grumbled, brushing past the still-frozen Quackity and scooping Philza’s body up. He trudged over to the couch and deposited him on it, then grabbed the

blanket off the couch arm and laid it over him. “How many times have I told you not to sit on the floor? My house doesn't have much floor space. Stop monopolizin' it or I'm gonna trip over you.”

He turned back and repeated the process with Dream, still muttering the entire time. When he went for Tommy, though, Quackity stepped in the way.

“Technoblade,” Quackity said. His voice was shaking. “Techno. What are you doing?”

Technoblade sent Quackity a sideways glance. “Uh, I’m moving them to the couch?”

“Why?”

“. . . So they’re more comfortable?” When Quackity kept staring at him, Technoblade clarified, “The floor isn’t exactly the nicest place to sleep.”

The Butcher Army exchanged looks. “Technoblade,” Quackity said in a strangely soft tone, “They’re dead.”

It slowly occurred to Technoblade that they thought he’d gone delusional with grief. “Uh. No? They’re just visitin’ Phil’s wife.” He tried to step around Quackity, only to be stopped by Fundy. “Could you let me through? I need to move Tommy.”

Another round of exchanging glances. “Why don’t you come with us,” Quackity suggested, still oddly gentle for a man who’d been trying to kill him half an hour ago. “I think we can, uh, talk this out.”

Well, it looked like they weren’t planning to kill him anymore. That might change if he tried to refuse, though, so. . . “Sure. Can I just move Tommy first?”

Quackity and Fundy stepped aside. Technoblade awkwardly skirted around them, carefully avoided eye contact with the stone-faced Tubbo and sobbing Ranboo by the door, and scooped Tommy up. He set him down next to Dream, then tucked the largest blanket around both of them and turned back to the L'Manbergians. “Okay. Let’s go.”

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“Well, this is awkward.”

Tubbo, seated across from him, didn’t so much as blink. “Why did he do it?”

“Why did who do what?”

Tubbo pulled Philza’s dagger out of his inventory and set it on the table between them. Technoblade eyed it with mild displeasure. The thing was *important* to Phil, and letting someone else handle it rubbed him the wrong way. However, he had bigger things to worry

about at the moment - for example, Tubbo's questions. "Why did Philza kill Tommy and Dream?"

"He didn't kill them," Technoblade said with the patience of a saint. "I told you, they're not dead."

"Stop lying."

"Look into my eyes, Mr. President. I'm not lyin'."

Tubbo's fingers tightened around the dagger. And then he burst into tears.

Fundy hastily herded him out of the room, his own pale face and trembling hands suggesting that he wasn't much farther from breaking down himself. Technoblade watched them go with an expression of mild consternation. "Phil's going to want that dagger back."

Quackity slid into the seat Tubbo had vacated, his face creased with grief. "Phil-- Phil isn't coming back, Techno."

Technoblade huffed. "I've said this like ten times. He's not dead."

"He *is* dead."

"He's not."

"Technoblade. That was a fatal wound."

"I know what fatal wounds look like, Quackity."

"Philza is dead. So are Tommy and Dream."

"I am going to *laugh* at you when they barge in here."

"They're not coming here, Techno. They're dead."

At that moment, the door slammed open. "Get the *fuck* away from him," one very alive Philza Minecraft snarled. Tommy and Dream spilled in behind him, both armed to the teeth and bristling with weaponry. Quackity scrambled to his feet, arms raised and eyes wide.

"What the fuck," he breathed. "What-- how the fuck are you alive?!"

"Phil, they're trying to therapize me," Technoblade informed the avian. "They thought I went insane 'cause I kept tellin' them you'd come back. Ha."

"What the *fuck*," Quackity repeated, head snapping between the two of them. "You, what, you're--" he gestured helplessly at the three newly-revived men. "*How?*"

"We were visiting Phil's wife!" Tommy chirped. "Apparently he's married to the Goddess of Death - very cool woman by the way, the coolest I've ever met - so we had to be near death to see her!"

Quackity made a noise like a malfunctioning teakettle and sank down into a crouch, burying his hands in his hair.

Technoblade did feel slightly sympathetic to his plight. Prime knew Philza pulled things like this all the time on *him*. Still, the modicum of empathy he felt didn't outweigh his schadenfreude. "See? Told you they weren't dead."

Quackity raised his head from his knees long enough to glare up at him. "I hate you so much," he informed him.

"Feeling's mutual, Quackity. The feeling's mutual."

## Chapter End Notes

i. Philza nearly gave poor Tubbo a heart attack when he stormed into his office and demanded his dagger be returned. Dream's offer to compensate Tubbo with an enchanted butter knife was not appreciated.

Aivoze drew some [beautiful fanart](#) for this loop!



## ii.

### Chapter Summary

A more realistic reaction to being stuck in an unending timeloop with your worst enemy, and the aftermath of watching all your hard work being destroyed by a reset.

### Chapter Notes

Why it isn't canon: Too angsty. I couldn't really reconcile this with the "oh yeah let's just ignore the fact that time is repeating with no end in sight by making it funny" attitude glitterduo has.

#### **TW: Minor Suicidal Ideation**

Technoblade's voice echoed through the crackling flames. Smoke filled Tommy's lungs. He could feel the charred dirt shifting under his feet and the armor hanging heavy across his chest.

He was back at the Manberg-Pogtopia war. He'd gone back in time. After three painstaking years playing perfectly by the script, even when no one had been around to watch, they'd still been sent back in time.

Three years of suffering, gone just like that. It hadn't ended the loops. It hadn't done *shit*. No, they'd just been sent back-- back to the second worst day of Tommy's life.

So Tommy opened his mouth and screamed. And screamed. And screamed until his lungs ran out of air, at which point he doubled over and screamed some more. He could hear Tubbo's voice ringing behind him, alarmed.

Warm hands settled on his back. He threw them off and turned his head towards the sky. "FUCK YOU!" he screamed. "FUCK YOU! I'M DONE WITH YOUR GAMES!"

There was a commotion on the other side of the chasm, and Tommy looked up to realize that Dream had collapsed to his knees and begun laughing hysterically.

"Stop fucking laughing!" Tommy shouted at him. "I'm done with this. With everything. We did it *perfectly*, and *nothing changed*! I'm not fucking doing this again! I'm done, you hear

me?!”

Dream just laughed harder, clawing at the dirt with his hands. Eventually the humorless cackle bled from his throat and spilled into sobbing, at which point he gave up trying to hold himself up and simply collapsed facedown on the ground. Tommy, meanwhile, had struggled to his feet and was now striding towards the chasm with single-minded purpose. Just as he was about to throw himself over the edge, hands closed around his arms and dragged him back. He whirled around with a snarl, only to be met by the sight of a wide-eyed Tubbo.

“Tommy?” he asked.

Tommy stared at him. “. . . Ohhhhh no. No. Fuck you. Fuck this. I’m not doing this.” He tried to tug his arms out of Tubbo’s hold, but the other teenager’s grip only tightened.

“Tommy, please,” Tubbo begged, trying to wrestle him away from the edge. “What’s gotten into you?!”

“Oh I’ll *tell you* what’s gotten into me,” Tommy snarled, shoving him away. He ignored the flash of stunned hurt that flashed across his *friend-not-friend’s* face as he swept a hand at the scene around them. “*This! All of this fucking bullshit* just keeps happening again and again and *again!* I spent *three fucking years* trying to end it all! *Three years*, gone, wasted, because this universe doesn’t give a *shit!* Hilarious, huh?!” He turned his face towards the sky and flung up his middle finger. “Well *fuck you!* I’m not your chew toy! And I’m not gonna play by your *fucking* rules!”

“Dream, Dream, what the fuck is wrong with you?!” Sapnap’s voice rose above the commotion, pinched with frantic worry. Tommy glanced over to see that Dream had been rolled onto his back and was now staring blankly at the sky, his mask tossed aside. The not-teenager gritted his teeth, frustration clawing at the inside of his stomach.

“OI, BASTARD!” he snapped. “DON’T JUST LIE THERE! DO SOMETHING!”

Without sitting up, Dream turned his head to look at him. And then he smiled. It was a broken thing, jagged at the edges and strung through with madness. “What’s the point?” he rasped. His voice, though quiet, rang out across the chasm like a death rattle. “We’re never getting out of this.”

And Tommy--

--Tommy *crumbled*. His legs gave out from under him. Tubbo tried to catch him, but he was only dragged down with him. Tears welled up in Tommy’s eyes. He hunched over, dry heaving as the taste of salt and bile crawled up his throat. A sudden *emptiness* yawned in his chest, void-black and all-consuming. They were going to be trapped here forever. Every inch of progress they gained would be lost in the next reset. They couldn’t escape into death’s domain. They couldn’t keep anything they gained in life. Their friends and family would turn on them again and again, and then they’d wake up and they’d all be friends and family *again*, except they *hadn’t* been the day before and--

“It’s never going to end,” he whispered.

Tubbo's voice was in his ear, sounding so *terribly* worried. "What's never going to end, Tommy? Talk to me, please, we can-- we can fix this, we can help you--"

"No, you can't," Tommy said. And then he pressed his forehead into the dirt and *screamed*.

### iii.

#### Chapter Summary

Everyone involved in the final confrontation in remix, sans Tommy and Dream, go back in time and try to prevent what happened from ever happening again.

Tommy and Dream are. . . very confused.

#### Chapter Notes

Why it isn't canon: Nobody besides Dream, Tommy, and the third traveler are looping. Also, loop timelines are destroyed when glitterduo leaves so it isn't really possible for the remix cast to go back in time

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*(credit to ConnorsBonez)*

Tommy slammed a picture down onto the courtroom table. It was an image of George's burning house. A picture of Dream giving the camera a thumbs up, which had obviously been cut out of another picture, was glued into the space next to the house.

Tommy pointed at the paper. "Caught in 4K, bitch!"

A long moment of silence. Dream stared down at the picture, expression hidden behind his mask. "Oh, no," he said at last. "You caught me. I lied, I burned down George's house. Guess this means I have to go into exile."

At that moment, everyone in the courtroom *except* the two loopers seemed to collectively recoil. "Tommy," Tubbo gasped a moment later. Tommy exchanged confused glances with Dream.

"Uh. . . yeah?"

Tubbo lurched off the podium and all but scrambled up to him, eyes wild. "Tommy," he said. "Tommy, what the fuck are you doing?"

"Um." Tubbo was acting strange. Very strange. "I'm. . . going to escort Dream into exile?"

"Like *hell* you will," a new voice snarled. Both loopers turned to see Sapnap march up to them and physically plant himself in front of Dream. "Stay *away* from him."

“Ookay,” Dream said. He seemed a bit freaked out. Tommy didn’t blame him - nobody was acting like they usually did. “Did something happen?”

Sapnap just looked even *angrier*. When he spoke, his voice trembled with a volatile mix of fury and guilt. “We know, Dream.”

Tommy’s heart stopped. Dream, too, went stiff. “Know what?” the man said. He was trying to sound nonchalant, but his shaking hands gave him away.

“Tommy threatened you into exiling yourself.”

Tommy’s brain short-circuited. That. . . had not been the reply he was expecting, and it left him with more questions than answers. For one, Tommy *hadn’t* threatened Dream. They’d basically agreed to try out exiling Dream for shits and giggles this loop. Where the fuck had Sapnap gotten the idea that Tommy was *threatening* him?

Dream seemed to be on the same boat. “Uh. . . no he didn’t?”

Grief dampened the rage in Sapnap’s eyes. “You don’t have to protect him, Dream. He can’t hurt me or George. We can take care of ourselves.”

Okay. So. Sapnap thought he threatened to hurt him and George to get Dream to exile himself. And nobody else in the courtroom looked surprised by this accusation. Okay. That. That didn’t make any sense.

“Um,” said Dream. He looked back at Tommy for help. Tommy just shrugged. What the fuck did they do in this situation?

At that moment, the courtroom door slammed open and *Technoblade* stormed in. He scanned the room, zeroing in on Tommy. “*You*,” he growled.

“Uh,” Tommy said, then backpedaled when Technoblade *stalked* towards him. “Woah woah woah! Listen, I don’t know what’s gotten into you but charging people isn’t very pogchamp of you--”

“You know full well what’s gotten into me, you snivellin’ *coward*.”

“Waitwaitwait! Everyone time out!” Heads turned to Dream, who had gotten down from the podium in an attempt to physically protect Tommy. “I think there’s been a misunderstanding here-- Tommy *really* didn’t blackmail me. I don’t know where you got that idea from, but he didn’t. I promise.”

There was a moment of silence. Then Tubbo took a deep breath, setting his shoulders with a look of grim determination. “Everyone who remembers Tommy’s base, raise your hands.”

Every hand save for Tommy and Dream’s went up. Tubbo grimaced.

“Right, I, uh, remember going there to detain Tommy. And then I woke up here. Is that the same for everyone else?”

A round of assents, all laced with varying degrees of confusion or anger. Tommy and Dream exchanged glances again, because *Tommy's* base? Detaining *Tommy*?

"Okay. So." Tubbo cleared his throat. "Tommy, Dream. This might sound weird, but we're . . . from a few months in the future."

Tommy straightened. "Wait. You. You *time traveled*?"

"Yes," Sapnap snapped. "So you can stop pretending, Tommy."

"Oh shit," Tommy breathed, stumbling sideways and half-collapsing against the podium. His arms trembled as he struggled to hold himself up. "*Shit. You time-traveled.*"

"Are they in the loop?" Dream demanded, mask shoved aside to reveal the near-desperate light shining in his eyes. "Are you looping too now?"

"No, no, they can't be. I don't remember being the villain, but I've been thinking about switching for a couple loops now and-- and they probably lived a future where I did that. Or if they *are* looping, they're not looping with us. Otherwise we'd remem--" Tommy went pale. "Oh. Oh shit. Fuck. *Dammit.*"

"What?"

"If they're looping in and we're not - did their timeline become the *original* timeline?"

The color drained from Dream's face. "Oh," he managed to choke out. "That's. Not good."

Understatement of the literal century. If a loop where Tommy and Dream had switched roles became the baseline - if the *others* were now the loopers - then he was bound for a world of hurt.

"The fuck are you talking about?" The angry voice reminded them of the presence of the others-- specifically, Sapnap. The blaze hybrid was glancing between them, lips curved in a sharp scowl. "Loop? Switching?"

"Tommy and I are in a time loop," Dream said without preamble. "We. . . like to change things up. Uh. We haven't actually exchanged *roles* before, but--"

"*Roles?*"

"He's usually the villain. Used to be an abusive piece of shit, but four hundred loops change people." Tommy shrugged, carefully not meeting the horrified gazes now directed at him. "So, yeah, I've been thinking about switching roles for a few loops now, and, uh, I guess in your future we-- we did."

Deafening silence.

"Sorry," Dream added weakly.

Technoblade shifted, drawing all eyes to him. He affixed a blank stare on Tommy. “So. It was all an act.”

“Yes.”

“You killed Dream for an act. You blew up my house for an *act*.”

Tommy’s heart stuttered in his chest. “I did *what*?”

Technoblade ignored him, turning to Dream. “And you went along with it.”

Dream didn’t meet his eyes. “I, uh, probably did.”

Technoblade’s lips thinned into a white line. His face twisted with an odd mix of relief and betrayal-- relief that none of it had been real, betrayal because *none of it had been real*. In the end, he simply stared at Dream for several long seconds before abruptly spinning on his heel and stalking out of the courtroom. Philza, who had previously been hovering unnoticed at the fringes of the scene, sent an unreadable glance towards Dream and slipped out after him. Nobody tried to stop them.

Heavy silence settled over the courtroom. Tommy inched closer to Dream, shying away from the accusing glares directed at the two of them. The other looper bumped his shoulder in unspoken solidarity and cleared his throat. “So, uh. . . what happens now?”

“Would be nice if you explained everything,” Tubbo said. The words were flat, but the look on his face made Tommy’s stomach churn.

“We can do that.” Dream shifted, glancing at Tommy. Tommy shook his head at the silent question, leaving the burden of explanation to Dream. He didn’t think he could speak without falling apart.

Heaving out a breath, Dream began retelling the nightmare that had led them to this point. Tommy stared down at his shoes and tried to ignore Tubbo’s burning stare.

They’d been prevented from going down a path they’d have a hard time finding their way back from, but. . .

He wasn’t sure this outcome was much better.

## Chapter End Notes

\*sad kazoo noises\*

## iv.

### Chapter Summary

**TW: Assisted suicide - not treated seriously due to looping mechanics**

Dream wakes up in that month-long period in canon where Technoblade was also in the prison, and promptly asks XD for death. His cellmate has many questions.

### Chapter Notes

Why it isn't canon: Technoblade never got trapped in the prison in Loop Zero. However, I wrote this entire thing before I remembered that. (-w-, )

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The first thing he saw was obsidian.

Which was *not* something he wanted to see when he was planning on taking a vacation loop. Tommy wasn't doing too great at the end of the last loop either, so waiting for him to stage a breakout was risky. Going ghost would be more convenient, should he--?

**“What do you want, summoning me?”**

XD's voice grated at his ears. Dream instinctively recoiled before he registered the words, then sent a mental thank-you to whatever force was responsible for this looping bullshit for dropping him into such a convenient moment. “Death,” he blurted, then winced and amended, “painless. A painless death.”

XD did not seem to find anything wrong with this request. **“Very well,”** he rumbled. Dream braced himself as the god raised a hand, half expecting to come apart in a mess of bones and flesh. XD had promised it'd be painless, but his method of killing tended to be. . . *messy*. He should've requested for XD to leave his body intact, in case he wanted to revive himself. Hopefully Technoblade wouldn't get caught in the--

--oh shit. *He forgot about Technoblade.*

Dream had two seconds to regret his life choices before XD's fingers curled into a fist. The god *yanked* and Dream *lurched* with the motion, staggering forward as he felt something



*snap* inside of him. Hands closed around his arms and dragged him back, but it was already too late.

The last thing Dream saw was Technoblade's horrified expression.

---

When Dream resurfaced from the void, he was back in his cell.

Ghosts were born where their living counterparts had died. Loopers were no exceptions to this. At the moment, though, he really wished they were - mostly so he didn't have to deal with the scene in front of him.

Technoblade was crouching in one corner, curled protectively over Dream's (thankfully) intact corpse. Sam stood opposite him, in full Warden get-up and intimidating aura dialed up to 1000.

"Don't *touch him*," Technoblade snarled. His eyes were near-glowing in the dim light, and his pointed nails clicked against the obsidian as he crouched lower. "You take *one step closer*, I *rip your head off*."

The Warden adjusted his grip on his trident. "Step aside, Technoblade. You can't defeat me."

Technoblade's only response was a growl.

For a second, Dream genuinely considered nope-ing out of there. He'd had too shitty of a past loop to deal with this. But nope-ing out also meant leaving Technoblade behind, and for all that Technoblade was nigh invincible, he was currently weakened and armorless. Now that Dream was dead, Technoblade would become Quackity's target, which was Not Okay by any standard. So Dream resigned himself to postponing his vacation loop, took an unnecessary breath, and cleared his throat.

Both heads snapped toward him so quickly he heard their necks audibly *crack*. Ouch. Maybe he should invest in becoming a chiropractor. He was pretty sure a lot of people on the server could use it.

"Dr-Dream?" Sam's voice jerked him out of his attempts to recall which stronghold libraries had chiropractic manuals. The Warden's face was hidden behind his mask, but his white-knuckled grip on his trident spoke volumes.

Dream considered him for a moment, trying to determine what course to take. He could play one of his depressed ghost personas for sympathy points, though the likelihood of that being effective was. . . lower than if he just switched his personality to something absolutely jarring.

And. Well. There was nothing more jarring than Tommy Innit. If anyone questioned the personality change, he could just claim Dream's ghost became the thing he most hated. So after taking a second to mentally fortify himself, Dream drew himself up, gathered every ounce of acting skill he had, and *went for it*.

“YOU *FUCKING* BASTARD!”

It was highly gratifying to see both men flinch back, startled by a combination of the foul language and the heavy Cockney accent. Dream, however, was just getting started.

“YOU'RE A BARMY GIT! A TWIT! A PRAT! A RIGHT WRONG'UN, YOU ARE! AN ARSEHOLE WITH THE BRAINS OF A TOUCAN! YOU'RE @\$%@&\* AND A TOSSER AND A %^&#\*\$^ FOR A HYBRID @&\$\*@&\$! YOU DESERVE TO %#&\*@^%\*@&#%\*&\$%^&\*@%&#%#--”

Sam dropped his trident. He didn't even seem to notice.

Thankfully, Technoblade had been a bit faster to recover from his shock. His hand crept out, closing around the trident and lifting it from the obsidian with nary a sound. As Dream shifted a bit further from Technoblade, prompting Sam's gaze to follow him, the piglin hybrid slid to his feet, tore Sam's helmet off, and brought the trident down across the back of the creeper hybrid's head with a *clang*.

Even after spending a month in prison, Technoblade's strength was nothing to sneeze at. Sam keeled forward in a dead faint.

“--SON OF A #&\*@^%\*@\$#%\*\$%^&!”

The end of Dream's tirade rang across the cell as Technoblade lowered the trident. They both stared at the unconscious Warden.

“... Is he out?” Dream asked. His voice was a little hoarse from the shouting he'd done.

Technoblade kicked the Warden. No response.

“Dead to the world,” he confirmed. He raised an eyebrow at Dream. “... Care to explain what just happened?”

Explaining *anything* that had happened since the loop started would mean explaining the loops, which Dream avoided doing with a *passion*. “... No.”

“You said some pretty concernin' stuff, Dream. We're talkin' about this whether you like it or not.” Dream opened his mouth to protest, but Technoblade pointed at the corpse sprawled in the corner of the cell.

Dream shut his mouth. He wracked his brain for deflection strategies and came up empty. “. . . Shouldn't we get out of here while the Warden's knocked out?”

Technoblade's flat look told him the piglin hybrid knew *exactly* what he was doing. Thankfully, he recognized the priority shift. “Fine. But when we get out of here, you're going

to sit down and talk.” He held up a hand to forestall Dream’s protest. “You need help, Dream, and we’re goin’ to help you. Now get over here and help me get Sam’s armor off.”

Dream didn’t need help, but he knew when to pick his battles. Swallowing his protests, he began working a netherite boot off the Warden’s foot.

## Chapter End Notes

**iv.** Despite being one of the worst people on the server at communicating, Technoblade also tended to be the one who cared most for his friends. As touching as it was, it was also rather inconvenient for both loopers - and when Dream had successfully gotten Technoblade to Philza, he demonstrated his ability to phase through walls and ran away to start a cottagecore arc just to avoid talking about his feelings.

## V.

### Chapter Summary

While high on pain medication, Dream accidentally says some very concerning things to his friends.

### Chapter Notes

Why it isn't canon: wayyyy too self-indulgent. a) doesn't make sense to have pain meds in the DSMP - why waste time easing pain when you can just chug a potion? b) wouldn't fit into any point of the canon timeline c) I chose to write this in present tense, which doesn't fit with the style of the fic.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Dream wakes up, he's on cloud nine.

"Woooooah," he murmurs, staring at the funky lines on the ceiling. "They're dancing."

"Well shit," someone says. "How much did Ponk give him?"

"A lot," someone else answers. Dream blinks.

Wait. There's people. There's people in the room with him! He turns his head a bit, and finds that there's a pillow under it. It's a nice pillow. A nice soft pillow. ". . . I like this pillow."

"That's nice," says the blurry blue shape near his head. He squints. The blue resolves itself into a person. It's George! "What the fuck happened to you, Dream?"

"George!" someone hisses from the other side of his bed. He rolls his head over so he can see who it is. Ssnap, huh. He's sitting in another chair. There's two chairs in total! "Don't--"

"What?" George asks. "He's high right now. It'll be easier to get answers out of him."

"I'm. . . high?" Dream asks. He *does* feel very high. Very floaty. Like he's a balloon. Maybe he's going to float out of bed and into the sky.

The thought makes him giggle. George sighs. "Yes, Dream. You're on a lot of painkillers because you *somehow* managed to hurt yourself bad enough for Ponk to put you in a three-day coma."

“Sorry?” Dream tries. George makes a frowny-face at him. That’s not good. “Uhhh. . . I didn’t notice.”

“You didn’t notice,” George repeats. “You didn’t notice that you *broke half of your body*. ”

“Didn’t hurt?”

“You could’ve died from *internal bleeding*!”

“Oh.” Dream frowns. “. . . Sorry.”

George is turning kinda red. He does that when he’s frustrated. “Stop apologizing.”

“Sorry.” Oh. Wait. George told him to stop doing that. “S-- hmm. Okay.”

“Dream,” says Sam, and oh look Sam is here too! He’s taken over the chair Sapnap was sitting in. Where’d Sapnap go? “How did you get hurt?”

“Mmm. . . dunno.” Dream tries to think. There’s a hazy recollection of falling. “I . . . fell?” A clearer memory - bending his knees, blood roaring in his ears, lurching forward off the precipice-- “No, I jumped.”

There’s sharp intakes of breath all around him. “Why. . .?”

“Was being chased,” he tells Sam matter-of-factly. “Had to get away.”

“Chased?” George asks.

“Mm. Got out on my own for once. Thought I could do it myself.” Dream snorted. “Stupid. Got cornered. Jumped.”

“Who. . . were you running from?” That’s a new voice. Dream peers around Sam to see Quackity. He’s standing next to Sapnap (so that’s where he went!). Dream knows that Quackity and Sapnap were in the crowd chasing him, so why is he asking? Should he tell? Should he not?

“People,” he settles on saying. His head’s too floaty for him to go into complicated word games, and that’s a correct answer, right?

“No, no, I mean-- *who*? What were their names? Why were they. . . chasing you?”

“To lock me up.” Dream doesn’t know why they’re asking these questions, but it’s safest to play along. Maybe they’re putting on a show for George, so George won’t get upset that Dream turned into a big evil monster. “I broke out, though. Usually Tommy helps, but I didn’t want to wait for him this time.”

“Tommy,” Sam repeats. “Like. . . Tommy Innit?”

“Noooo. It’s Tommy Careful Danger Kraken Innit. You have to get his name right. He’s very serious about that sometimes.”

“Tommy knew about. . . this?”

“Yes? Everyone does,” Dream says, confused. It’s a giant-ass building. How would anyone miss it? And Sam and Quackity and Sapnap were there when he was locked up-- “Ohhh, do you mean the breaking-out part? Don’t worry, only Tommy ever tries to get me out. Or maybe Technoblade does if I ask, but I don’t get to ask a lot. It never lasts though.”

“The. . . ‘breaking out’ never lasts?”

“Mm. I always wake up in the cell. Over and over and over again.”

“Fucking hell, man,” says Quackity. His voice sounds funny. Quackity is funny.

“You’re really funny when you’re not breaking my fingers,” Dream tells him. “I like being friends with you.”

“When I’m not *what?*” Quackity asks. He looks kinda horrified. Dream reaches out and clumsily pats him on the arm.

“Don’t worry, you’re really good at it,” he assures him. “I like it when you do that. It hurts less than the other stuff.”

“Dream--” and oh, that’s Sapnap. “What do you mean, the ‘other stuff’?”

Dream’s head is getting kinda heavy. He lets it loll to the side. “Not s’posed to tell you,” he mumbles. “You don’t know. He said you did but you didn’t.”

“I don’t know what he’s talking about, I *swear*, ” Quackity says, and he’s talking really fast and scared. Why is he scared? Maybe there’s an intruder somewhere? Is this a robbery? Who robs a hospital?

“I know,” Sapnap says. “He’s probably just. . . mixing you up with someone. He’s, uh, not all there right now.”

Sam leans close to Dream. “Hey, Dream, buddy, you mind telling me who broke your fingers?”

Dream scowls. “Not s’posed--”

“Yeah, I know. It’ll be okay. You’re safe here.”

Dream shakes his head. “You’ll be mad.”

“I won’t be,” Sam promises, like a lying liar who lies.

“Doesn’t matter now,” Dream tries.

The skin around Sam’s eyes tightens. “Maybe not, but I think we’d like to know.”

“Mn.” Dream turns his head away. Why is Sam asking questions he already knows the answers to? Is it some kind of test? He’s not sure. He doesn’t like it.

“Dream?”

“Not gonna tell,” Dream grumbles. If it is a test, he won’t fail it.

“Dream,” oh, that’s George, from the other side of his bed. Dream forgot he was there. “You can tell us. You’re not going to get hurt.”

Not getting hurt sounds nice, but Dream knows it’s all a lie. His head’s getting all fuzzy again, like it does whenever he stops eating because it’s better than throwing up.

“Tired,” he mumbles. His eyelids droop.

“Dream,” George says again, but it sounds like it’s coming from a hundred miles away. Dream’s too tired and his head is too full of cotton and he doesn’t really want to talk anymore.

He sleeps.

## Chapter End Notes

v. Dream had been trying to escape by himself so that he wouldn’t have to wait for Tommy every time a loop started in prison. He succeeded once, but was spotted on the way out, resulting in a chase. The loop restarted mid-chase, but he was too panicked to register it. So he kept running, and ended up jumping off a cliff when he thought he was cornered because being a ghost was better than being in the Vault. Someone finds him and drags him to Ponk’s to be patched up. He receives a lot of visitors while he’s in a medically-induced coma. Sometimes he wakes up and says very concerning things to his visitors. People begin asking Tommy questions. Tommy tries to pass off Dream’s rambling as ‘drug-hallucination nonsense, probably’, which is affirmed by Dream when he becomes lucid enough to realize what he’s saying. Neither of them are very convincing.

## Chapter Summary

Karl learns what frogs are.

They're adorable. That's what they are.

## Chapter Notes

Why it's not canon: It is canon! I just didn't think it would be good to insert into the main fic bcs it doesn't have anything to do with the time loops (directly)

This bit is dedicated to astral bcs it was inspired by her karl w/ a frog doodle

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### *loop zero*

Its skin was a smooth, shiny leaf-green. It had three-toed, orange feet, two large black eyes, and a wide mouth. In short, it was the most *adorable* thing Karl had ever seen.

“Sapnap,” he whispered, eyes fixed on the tiny thing. “Sapnap, what is that?”

Sapnap looked between the creature and Karl. “Dude...have you never seen a frog before?”

“Frog,” Karl repeated, testing the way the *rrrr* rolled between his teeth. It was a nice name. A very nice name. He liked it a lot.

“I’m going to assume you’ve never seen a frog before,” Sapnap said, but Karl barely heard him over the building *eeeeeeeeeee* in his ears. It took him a moment to realize that he was the one making the noise.

“*I want to hold it,*” he whispered, cupping his hands beneath the leaf. The frog crawled to the edge and blinked up at Karl.

“I don’t think—” Sapnap began, then cut himself off when the frog hopped off the leaf and into Karl’s hands.

“You are the best thing I have ever seen,” Karl told the frog. It blinked slowly at him, then proceeded to make itself into a little froggy loaf on his palm and go to sleep. This action elicited another quiet but sustained, high-pitched “*eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee*” from Karl. He turned to Sapnap, practically vibrating with barely-restrained joy.



“Huh,” said Sapnap, looking at the tiny, fearless animal in the other man’s hands. “Are you, like, a frog whisperer or something?”

*“I am so happy right now, Sapnap. I’m ascending.”*

“...Good for you?”

Karl was too busy cooing over the frog to hear him. Sapnap sighed and left him to it.

## Chapter End Notes

vi. The frog Karl encounters is a [Morelet’s tree frog](#).

## Chapter Summary

When Dream and Tommy loop, they take physical changes back with them—including the many, many scars they've accumulated. This becomes a problem when their friends discover said scars and have *questions*.

## Chapter Notes

,,,this one is almost as long as the other 6 chapters combined

Why it's not canon: 1. Doesn't fit into ot looping mechanics (mental time travel) and fails to account for changes in physical age/worldbuilding implications. 2. Present tense. 3. Wayyyyy too self indulgent lol

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### **CW: Medical Inaccuracies (accuracy passed over in favor of concision), Violence**

"TEN PACES, *FIRE!*"

All sound seems to cut out from Tubbo's hearing. He watches as the two figures on the bridge whirl in unison, bows raised and arrows drawn—

And then both stagger, caught off-guard by something unseen. In his fumble, Dream releases his arrow—then lurches after it with a cry of distress (*why?*)—but it's already too late. The weapon spears Tommy straight through the stomach. Tommy jerks with the sudden impalement—tips back—and his own arrow flies loose, punching through Dream's ribs and sending the man tumbling into the water below.

"TOMMY!" Tubbo hears himself scream. The cacophony around him rushes back in all at once—Wilbur and Fundy crying out for Tommy, Dream's allies shouting as Punz hurls himself into the water—but Tubbo himself only has eyes for Tommy, lying on the wooden slats of the bridge. He scrambles down the incline to Tommy's side, Fundy and Wilbur hot on his heels, and arrives in time to see Tommy's eyes slip shut.

"Nonono," Tubbo says frantically. His hands hover over Tommy's torso, then abruptly snap back towards his own inventory. "Potion—do we have—"

"I have a regen!" Fundy cries, pulling out the aforementioned potion. "We need to get the arrow out of him—is he hurt anywhere else?"

Hands snake past Tubbo to cradle Tommy's skull. "His head," Wilbur bites out. When he withdraws, his palms are stained with blood. "He hit his head when he fell."

Dizzying relief rushes through Tubbo as he realizes that it was the fall that knocked Tommy out, not the blood loss. Then that relief disappears when he gets a good look at the arrow. It's buried deep, stuck at an angle, and tearing it out will aggravate the already-grievous injury. The arrow is still plugging the worst of the external bloodflow, but internal bleeding and shock are liable to kill Tommy if the damage to his organs doesn't get him first.

Tubbo takes a deep breath and reminds himself to focus on one thing at a time. They can't use regen on the wound with Tommy's shirt still on—the cloth might get in the injury and that's a whole clusterfuck nobody wants to deal with—so Tubbo draws the dagger Tommy gave him for his seventeenth birthday and cuts it away. The cloth is stubborn, practically glued to the skin with blood, but Tubbo steels himself and peels it away. Then he's left staring at the arrow, unable to muster up the mental fortitude to tear it free.

Wilbur gently shoulders him aside, wraps his fingers around the arrow, and rips it out. The wound instantly starts bleeding, but Fundy doesn't miss his cue—he smashes the Potion of Regeneration on the ground.

The injury begins to weep blood at an exponential rate—a sign that the potion is doing its job. The bleeding reaches an alarming peak, then gradually slows again as Tommy's internal organs are finally repaired. The flesh wound begins knitting back together shortly afterwards, and Tubbo slumps with relief as Tommy's labored breathing evens out.

"Fuck," Wilbur swears. There's a thump—likely due to his palms meeting the wooden slats of the bridge. "Fuck. He almost—shit. He could've lost his second life, fuck—"

"We healed him in time," Fundy breathes, joining Wilbur in hunching over on his hands and knees, his relief-weakened limbs too shaky to hold himself up. "He's going to be fine. Everything is fine. We're fine."

Tubbo doesn't say anything. He watches the edges of the wound close up, leaving the beginnings of an ugly scar behind. When he's sure the damage has been well and truly repaired, he checks the back of Tommy's head too, and is relieved to find that it's also stopped bleeding. Tommy will still wake up with a bump and one hell of a concussion, of course—regeneration doesn't fix everything—but the most life-threatening injuries are out of the way.

Tubbo runs a critical eye over Tommy's torso again just to check that he hasn't missed anything (to reassure himself that Tommy will be okay). Something catches his attention—an odd contortion peeking out from beneath the remains of Tommy's shirt. It's hard to tell what it is, so Tubbo peels back the cloth to get a better look at it. Is Tommy hurt elsewhere? It doesn't look like another wound, but with the blood from the arrow wound obscuring it, it's better to be safe than sorry—

Oh.

Tubbo stares, uncomprehending. Beside him, Wilbur makes a choked noise.

Tommy's skin is more scar tissue than skin. Some Tubbo can recognize—arrows, blades, burns—but some, he just—he doesn't know. He thinks those golden scars might be from a Totem of Undying, and maybe those creeping, dark lines are Lichtenberg figures, but—the layers of raw tissue are so inextricably intertwined, twisted together, that he can't really identify what created most of them.

A sharp inhale from Fundy has him turning his head right, up to where Tommy's face is. Tommy's hair is stained with blood, but Fundy's not focused on that—he's staring at Tommy's forehead, where dark, jagged lines rake across Tommy's nose and down his cheek like cracks in broken glass. Without thinking, Tubbo reaches out and swipes a finger across Tommy's temple. It comes away sticky with sweat-diluted makeup.

"What the fuck is this?" Wilbur asks. His voice trembles. "When did—how—"

Tubbo wracks his memory, trying to remember if he's ever seen Tommy hurt enough to cause this. He comes up with nothing—just memories of brash, laughing, Tommy, cheerful and bold and seemingly unaffected by the cruelties of the world around him. How could he have missed this? He's Tommy's best friend, for fuck's sake—his closest confidante and brother in all but blood. He couldn't have missed this.

And yet here was proof that he didn't know Tommy as well as he thought he did. Proof that Tommy lived through something horrific, and Tubbo had no idea. End, even *Wilbur* had no idea, and he'd practically *raised* him. Why had Tommy hidden this from all of them?

Why had he chosen to suffer in silence?

There are no answers to be found, not with Tommy unable to give them. So for now, Tubbo just closes his eyes and tries very, very hard not to be sick.

---

The moment Punz drags Dream out of the water and onto the bridge, he's snapping orders. "Get the mask off, we need to roll him on his side so he can get rid of any water he inhaled \_\_\_"

George fumbles with the clasp at the back of Dream's head. It's much harder than it should be to undo the catch. The moment he pries it free, Punz and Sapnap roll Dream onto his side.

The injured man's labored breathing stutters once—twice—and then he vomits water and blood onto the wooden slats, limbs spasming and flailing at the arrow still lodged in his chest. George curses and grabs his arms before he can injure himself. Punz hastily rolls him back onto his back and pins his legs down. Dream shrieks even as blood bubbles past his lips, a horrible, cracked noise of sheer terror that makes George's stomach churn. It's almost a mercy when he goes limp, unconscious.

"Sapnap," George snaps, glancing at the man frozen half-crouched on Dream's other side. Sapnap jerks into action at the sound of his name, pulling both a Potion of Healing and a Potion of Regeneration from his inventory. In the same instant, Punz moves himself to Dream's shoulder and sets to work cutting away at his hoodie, leaving the wound exposed to the air. The moment he's finished, he directs a sharp nod towards George.

George doesn't let himself think. He just braces himself and *yanks*. The instant the arrowhead slides free, Sapnap drops the potions. Pink and red mist explode around them, momentarily obscuring George's vision.

When they clear, the bleeding has visibly slowed and the unhealthy gray pallor of Dream's face has begun to fade. George watches his closed eyes like a hawk, waiting for any twitch or sign of approaching consciousness. Punz, standing at Dream's other side, must have the same idea, because he's staring at the general area of Dream's head with the oddest expression.

"What," Sapnap says, as though beginning a sentence. George turns his head in slight acknowledgment, then actually looks at Sapnap when the man fails to complete whatever thought he'd been about to voice.

Sapnap has gone an unflattering, pasty white. His eyes, usually glowing with the blazefire, are dark and fixed intently on one point. George follows his gaze down to the freshly-healed arrow wound, and only then does he notice the scars around it.

It's...George doesn't even know where to begin. There's so *many*, layers upon layers and—he can't even see any clear skin, how could Dream have survived this? There's flesh wounds, things easily written off as a stray mob getting too close or an accident in sparring, but—there's fatal wounds too. Scars that could only form by losing a life, like the thick ring of scar tissue around Dream's neck that speaks of decapitation.

But that's not the worst of it. No, the worst part is the—the clinical ones, the ones that are neither accidental nor fatal. The ones that are precise. Marks of torture. And then when Punz reaches down and tilts Dream's head so George can see why the mercenary's been making that odd expression—

George never knew why Dream chose to wear such a creepy mask. But now, staring at the jagged smiley face carved into his cheek, he thinks he might understand.

Sapnap is the first to speak. "What the fuck."

"What the fuck," George echoes, because it's all he can say. It's one thing to have battle scars. It's quite another to have marks of torture.

"A lot of these are...old," Punz says, his voice vaguely strained. "Years old."

Unsaid is the fact that Dream, like the rest of them, is barely out of his teens. For scars to be old, he'd have been a child when he received them.

"There's more than three death scars here," Punz continues. "And I think those lines there might be from Totems. Then there's...his wrists."

George looks down at Dream's arms. They're covered by his sleeves, but he can see a patch of furrowed, paler skin stretching from beneath the cloth and extending about a centimeter up the back of his hand. It's definitely a scar, but not one he recognizes the cause of.

"What *are* those?" Sapnap asks.

"Chafe scars from cuffs," Punz answers.

George makes it seven feet away before he throws up.

---

Dream's allies seem to be having a moment on their end of the bridge. It would be the perfect time to strike—to attack when they're down a fighter and distracted—but neither Tubbo nor Fundy nor Wilbur say a word.

It's hard to think that just fifteen minutes ago, they would've done anything for independence. Now, Tubbo just wants to drag Tommy home and let him *heal*, independence and L'Manberg be damned.

"Fuck," a voice says above them. Tubbo jerks up to see Sapnap staring down at Tommy. His eyes are haunted. "Fuck, he's almost as bad as Dream."

The snappish *what do you want?* dies in Tubbo's throat. Instead, he croaks, "As bad as Dream?"

"The scars," Sapnap says. "I—I couldn't look so—I came over here but—"

He's still staring at Tommy. Tubbo finds his own gaze drifting past him, to Dream lying on the other side of the bridge. He's too far away for Tubbo to make out anything, but if Sapnap's reaction is any clue...

"He has the same scars?" He asks.

"No, it's just—a lot. A lot of them, fuck—might be more than—" Sapnap waves a hand toward Tommy, "—this. It's hard to tell."

Morbid curiosity worms its way into Tubbo's stomach. "Does he...have similar scars?"

For some reason, Sapnap's gaze almost instantly snaps towards Tommy's...arms? Whatever he's looking for, he doesn't find, because his shoulders slump with something like relief.

"The...death wounds," he says. "Dream has a lot of those, too. And the burns."

"The TNT or the lava ones?"

"Both."

Fundy clears his throat. "Do you think that—maybe the, uh, their scars are—connected?"

"Just because we found out about both of them at the same time doesn't mean that they're connected," Wilbur cuts in. He's trying his best not to sound absolutely wrecked, but he's not quite succeeding. "Dream and Tommy haven't—they never act like they knew each other before the SMP."

"They don't have to have known each other," Fundy says.

The measured inflection in his voice has Tubbo peering at him. "You have a theory?" he can't help but ask.

Fundy hesitates, but when Sapnap and Wilbur turn their attention on him, he relents. "I think they might've been in an underground fighting ring."

"Hypixel doesn't leave scars like that—" Sapnap begins, but Fundy shakes his head.

"No, I'm talking the—the *really* underground ones. The ones without all of Hypixel's safety regulations, the ones that get involved with trafficking—*those*. I've met a survivor from one of them before, he's—he's also like Tommy. And Dream. With the scars."

It...makes a horrible amount of sense, loathe as Tubbo is to admit it. "And Tommy and Dream could've been in different rings," he murmurs. "Which is why they don't know each other."

"Fuck," Sapnap suddenly hisses. "*Fuck*, trafficking—*shit*."

Without warning, he spins on his heel and stalks towards his allies on the other end of the bridge. Tubbo, Fundy, and Wilbur watch him go in vague befuddlement. "Uh," Tubbo says, "Did I...accidentally offend him or something?"

"I think he's having some realizations," Wilbur assures him. A thread of irony creeps into his voice. "Some difficult ones."

*Just like them*, goes unsaid. Gloomy silence descends upon the three of them.

"I think," Wilbur says after a short eternity, "that it's best if we save the discussion about independence for...a later date."

He pauses, then, like he's expecting protests. Nobody speaks.

Wilbur nods and laboriously creaks to his feet. "I'll go discuss it with Dream's allies."

He shambles off towards the opposite end of the bridge. Tubbo doesn't watch him go—just clasps Tommy's clammy hand in his own and silently wishes for this nightmare to be over.

---

Tommy awakens, and instantly wishes he hadn't.

"Fuck," he hisses as the migraine pounding behind his temples makes itself known. He tries to crack open his eyes, then shuts them with a cry as a dizzying wave of nausea sweeps through him. "Urgh—*shit*—"

"Sorry, sorry," a hushed voice whispers. Tommy's groggy mind identifies it as Tubbo. The backs of his eyelids dim as the *shhhh* of curtains being drawn meets his ears. "Is that better?"

Tommy once again tries to crack his eyes open. It's a little better—in the sense that instead of a pickaxe being driven through his skull, it's more of a toothpick through his eyeball. He shuts his eyes again with a grunt.

Tubbo sighs, but it sounds dejected rather than exasperated. Hands wiggle beneath his back and bolster him into a sitting position. He shuffles back until his spine hits a stack of what are presumably pillows. A moment later, a straw is pressed to his lips. "Drink."

The mystery liquid turns out to be a diluted Healing, if the bitter aftertaste of glistening melon is any clue. By the time Tubbo pulls the cup away, Tommy's migraine has eased significantly and his brain no longer feels like it's attempting to brute-force its way out of his skull. He clears his throat. "...Wha' 'appened?"

"You dueled for independence with Dream," Tubbo answers. His voice is flat. Tommy peels open one eye to squint at him, but it's hard to make out his expression in the dim light.

"...Did I win?" He's still disoriented from the sudden switch between loops. The last thing he remembers is the sensation of falling, right before pain blossomed across the back of his head and his vision went dark.

"Kinda," Tubbo says. "You knocked Dream out, but he hit you too."

"Mmgh."

There's an expectant pause, but Tubbo doesn't continue. The way the floorboards creak indicate that he's shifting from foot to foot. Trepidation rises in Tommy's stomach.

"Ubbo?"

"Tommy, I...you trust me, right?"

Well, fuck. That sentence is never a good sign. "Course. You're m'best friend."

"You know you can tell me anything?"

"Uh, yeah...?"

Uneasy silence descends between the two of them. Tubbo's clearly waiting for Tommy to admit something, but Tommy's not sure what he's supposed to admit.



Eventually, Tubbo cracks. "We used a regen on you to keep the arrow wound from killing you," he admits.

Tommy's not sure why he's treating that like a big deal. "Okay...?"

"We had to get everything clear of the wound first. Including your shirt."

At first, Tommy doesn't get it. Is Tubbo upset about ruining his shirt? He knows he has like, ten copies of it, though, so that can't be it. Then what is it? What about his shirt is so—

Oh.

Oh shit.

"Tommy," Tubbo says, and he sounds somewhere between furious and heartbroken. Fuck. "Where did you get those scars?"

Tommy doesn't open his eyes, because if he does, Tubbo will see his panic. His concussion's making it ten times harder to think up lies. "Fights."

Tubbo makes a noise of frustration. "*What* fights? I grew up with you, Tommy—this is the first war we've been in!"

"T's not my first," Tommy mutters, then pales when he realizes that he said that aloud. "Shit. No. That was a joke."

"What—?"

"I fought mobs," Tommy says over Tubbo's requests for clarification. "Snuck out at night and practiced and shit."

"You have death scars!"

Right, he does have those. "Practice went wrong. Server had infinite respawns. I was fine."

"The TNT scars? The *burns*?"

"...Accidents."

It's a terrible lie. Even the most hardened players never gain this level of scarring simply by going through life. Either Tommy's incompetent, or he's lying. And Tommy is anything but incompetent when it comes to survival.

"Tommy," Tubbo says. The flat tonality of his words has Tommy curling his hands into fists beneath his blanket. "Were you in a fighting ring?"

For a moment, Tommy's concussed mind just. Blanks. Goes completely empty. He even opens his eyes to stare at Tubbo. How the fuck had Tubbo come to that conclusion?

Tubbo must take his stunned silence as confirmation, though, because his face just—crumples. "Shit," he whispers. "*Shit*. How did we never notice?"

"Uh," Tommy interjects before Tubbo can spiral into full-out self loathing. He tries to formulate his thoughts into a coherent question, but all that comes out is a strangled, "What?"

"Sapnap and the others found out about Dream's scars."

Well, fuck.

"So you do know something."

Did Tommy say that out loud?

"Yes."

So his concussion has all but totaled his brain-to-mouth filter. Double fuck.

Tommy tries to rally himself, but the headache is starting to grow worse and he just feels so *exhausted*. With each minute that ticks by, his self control grows thinner and thinner. He's in no shape to fend off Tubbo's questions, much less lie to his face.

"Tommy?"

He doesn't know what to do. So he shuts his eyes and tries to ignore Tubbo. Maybe if he falls asleep he won't have to deal with this. He's certainly *tired* enough to fall asleep.

"Tommy, please. We just—we just want to know what *happened* to you."

Tommy can't help it—he laughs. It's short, sharp, and completely devoid of humor. "What *hasn't* happened to me?" he chokes out, squeezing his eyes shut. "I've been fighting for longer than I haven't. Every time I get through the worst shit, it jus' hits me in the face all over again. It *never stops*." His voice cracks on the last word, but now the dam is broken and then he *can't stop talking*. "I'm so fuckin' *tired*, Tubbo. I just wanna get everything over with, but there's no escape. I can't even *die* to get out. I've died more times than I can count. Fuck, I've prob'ly died more than anyone else. 'Cept Dream. Dream's got shit luck."

He slumps back, exhausted. What remains of his energy is rapidly fading, drained by his tirade. When Tubbo speaks, his voice wavers—but Tommy is so lost to the haze of fatigue and pain that he doesn't really notice. "You—know what happened to Dream?"

Tommy groans, his head lolling against his pillows. "Fuck, Dream," he mumbles. "He's like, a walking mass of scar tissue. Chronic pain, psychosomatic disorders, a shitton of trauma, you name it, he's got it. He needs to take, like, ten strength potions to get through th' day—d'you know how fast he burns through my 'gredients? Issa bitch grinding for blaze powder, but we gotta because otherwise he might actually die of potion withdrawal or forget how to fuckin' *walk*. And it keeps getting *worse* because every time we go back he's almost always fighting or they lock 'im up and cut him to bits—"

He doesn't really remember much of what he says after that. It's all a big blurry jumble pouring out of his mouth on autopilot, and at one point he thinks someone else comes into the room, but by then he's already so deep in the exhaustion that he doesn't even really register who it is. The headache's doing its damn best to keep him awake, but it doesn't take long for the heaviness in his bones to drag him into the dark.

When sleep comes, Tommy welcomes it with open arms.

---

When Dream wakes up, he's sore all over.

"Dream?"

"Hrmghf," is Dream's intelligent reply.

"You're awake." Sapnap doesn't sound too pleased, but Dream's too out of it to decipher whether it's because he's alive or...some other reason. He wracks his mind for his last memory. One moment, he'd been speaking to Tommy, and in the next, he'd been spinning around to see the other looper at the opposite end of a bridge. The arrow had flown from his bow before he could realize what he was doing, and—

"Tommy!" he shouts, bolting upright. Or, at least, he tries to shout. It comes out sounding more like "Mmy!", impeded by his parched throat. A moment later, every muscle in his body proceeds to protest his sudden movement by *burning*. He sinks back into the bed with a wheeze.

"Shit—" Sapnap stands from his chair and hastily helps him prop himself up. "Don't move so fast, you're still recovering."

Before Dream can ask what exactly he's recovering from, Sapnap's holding out an uncorked bottle of water. Dream takes it with much gratitude and drinks it all with slow, careful sips. When he's done, he feels a little better. He hands the empty bottle back and clears his no-longer-parched throat. "What happened?"

"You shot Tommy. Tommy shot you. Arrow got you in the shoulder, knocked you into the water, you almost drowned. We got you out before you lost a life. No sign of secondary drowning yet, but you're on bedrest until Ponk says you can leave."

That's fine with Dream—he has no intention of leaving this bed anytime soon. The soreness eating away at his muscles is only compounded by the all-too-familiar ache settling across his skin and the stiffness in his joints. If he tries to stand right now, he'd probably fall over. He just needs to know—"Is Tommy alive?"

"...Yes," Sapnap says. The odd lilt in his voice has Dream looking up at him.

Sapnap's face is eerily blank, but there's uncertainty and maybe even *fear* written into the slant of his shoulders. He opens and closes his mouth several times, second-guessing his sentences before he can even speak them.

"Sapnap?" Dream questions. He's getting worried.

"The kid survived," Sapnap forces out. He visibly waffles for a few more seconds before adding, "We...learned some. Uh. Things. While the two of you were out."

Dream blinks guilelessly to hide the dread sinking in his stomach. "What things?"

Sapnap takes a breath to speak, stutters, exhales, stares down at the floor for a long moment—then sets his shoulders, looks Dream in the eyes, and says, "We know about the scars."

It takes Dream a few seconds to process those words. And then the panic hits him like a fucking *minecart*. The ache goes sharp and *cutting*—he can't breathe—it *hurts*—

"—eathe! Dream, c'mon—copy me, you gotta—in, two three, four—"

Dream does his best to copy Sapnap. The blaze hybrid leads him through round after round of carefully counted-out breaths. Slowly, the iron bands around his chest loosen. The burning of his scars dulls to a throb.

"Sorry," he grits out. "M back."

"No, no—that's on me, I should've—" Sapnap makes a frustrated noise and turns away from the bed to scrub a hand through his hair. He takes a few deep breaths, settling himself, before he turns back to Dream. "I. Sorry. I could've been a bit less. Blunt."

"I would've panicked either way," Dream tells him. While Tommy hid his scars out of a desire to avoid a) explaining them or b) being subjected to the suffocating, unnecessary mother-henning of his various protective figures, Dream hid his because he didn't want to reveal a weakness or past trauma for someone to exploit.

Quackity had a penchant for reopening old wounds. Literally.

Sapnap doesn't look reassured by Dream's words. "Dream, what the *fuck* happened to you?"

"I've been in a lot of fights," Dream offers.

"Fights don't leave you with a fucking *smiley face* carved into your cheek, Dream. Or these." Sapnap grasps his own wrist and shakes it for emphasis, indicating the scars the manacles had left behind.

Phantom pain sparks around Dream's wrists. He shrugs. "I didn't win all of those fights."

Sapnap stares at him. "What, so your opponent fucking *tortured* you?"

Dream is silent for a long moment. "Think what you want," he says at last. "I don't want to talk about it."

Sapnap exhales harshly through his nose, but surprisingly doesn't press the subject. Instead, he nods towards the bedside table, where a bottle filled with the familiar dark red of Strength waits. "Tommy said you had a potion dependency. You might want to deal with that."

Tommy said *what*?

Well then. Either Tommy has a head injury, or he's been hurt badly enough that they've got him hopped up on potions. Shit, they probably know about *his* scars too. He can't do anything about it at the moment, though—not with Sapnap in the room with him—so he turns his attention back to the present.

Indeed, he's already feeling the effects of withdrawal on his fucked-up nervous system. He takes the bottle and uncorks it with shaking hands, then downs it all in two gulps. Almost immediately, the sharp ache in his bones dulls to a throb. His limbs stop trembling.

Sapnap's lips thin. Dream doesn't bother trying to explain—he just sets the bottle on the nightstand and sits back to await judgment.

"Were you in a fighting ring?" Sapnap asks, apropos of nothing.

Dream fights very hard not to react, but the sheer *ludicrousness* of the idea still has his eyes widening with surprise. Sapnap catches the tell—and takes it as confirmation, if his rapidly-darkening expression is any indication.

"Why didn't you *tell us*?"

Dream flounders for a moment. How is he supposed to react here? Does he go with it? Does he deny it? As far as lies go, this one's a pretty good cover for both himself and Tommy—especially if they don't want to tell people about the loops.

Mind made up, Dream turns his attention towards his next course of action. If he really was in a fighting ring, he'd be snappish. Defensive.

So he furrows his face into a glower, bunching the blankets in his fists to pull on a thin veneer of anger. "I don't owe you my life story, Sapnap," he snaps. "We're friends. But I don't have to tell you *everything*. "

Sapnap rears back like he's been slapped—then lurches forward, eyes blazing. "We could've *helped*, " he snarls, meeting Dream's perceived vexation with his own. "You should've—"

"I should've *what*? It's done. It happened. It's over. You weren't involved, and I didn't want to involve you." When the blaze hybrid opens his mouth, he shakes his head. "*Back off*, Sapnap. It's none of your business."

Uneasy silence descends between the two of them. The fire in Sapnap's eyes dims—not because it's gone, but because Sapnap has moved past his knee-jerk reaction and is now contemplating what Dream said. Dream lets him stew in his own thoughts for a while, content to pick at the edges of his blanket and focus on lowering his heart rate to acceptable

levels. When he hears Sapnap shift, he looks up—and sees the blaze hybrid glowering in the general direction of Dream's knees.

"What are you going to do about L'Manberg?" he asks, a complete non sequitur. Dream knows it's not admitting defeat—they *will* be discussing his tragic backstory later, likely with the others present. He'll take what he can get—he just needs some time alone so he can talk to Tommy about *what* they're going to tell people.

"Give them independence," Dream says, going with the change of topic. "Tommy hit me."

"But he didn't *win*. You hit him first."

Dream looks at him. Considers the course of the timeline. Considers Sapnap's theory about his and Tommy's backstories. Makes a decision.

"He knocked me into the water," he begins delicately, "out of bounds. I know the agreement was first shot, but by...well, by the—*nicer*—arena rules...he wins."

A muscle jumps in Sapnap's jaw. Dream watches as his irises go magma-bright for one frightening second. Then he shuts his eyes, takes a deep breath, and carefully uncurls his fingers from the fists they're clenched in.

"I'll go let the others know you're awake," he grits out. "We'll talk it over together."

With that, he spins on his heel and stalks out.

Dream sighs and slumps back against his pillows. It's the first time something like this has happened in...well, nearly a century—and Dream didn't have nearly as many scars back then. The others are going to be *insufferable*.

One thing's for certain, though: this loop will definitely be *interesting*.

## Chapter End Notes

**vii.** L'Manberg does get independence. Which means everyone's free to freak out over their friends having secret tragic backstories.

The others go with the "fight ring" theory because they're not sure how else to interpret Tommy's comments about "going back" and "no escape", and Dream indirectly confirmed it with his comment about "arena rules". They keep an eye on them to make sure they're not going to somehow get involuntarily teleported into an underground fight ring or something.

Of course it does a grand total of nothing to stop the loops, but Dream and Tommy are pretty relieved not to have to go around in full-body outfits to hide their scars anymore. Summer kinda sucks when you have to wear long sleeves.

## Chapter Summary

### **CW: Spoilers for on temporizing and loop zero**

Dream and Tommy loop back to the end of loop zero—mere minutes before the nuclear bomb hits. Now they have to get everyone away from the blast radius—*fast*.

## Chapter Notes

Why it's not canon: this part of loop zero has been completely obliterated from existence by Karl's timeline shenanigans. It's canonically impossible for Dream and Tommy to loop into this time period.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Both loopers opened their eyes just as they locked blades. They froze simultaneously, taking in their situation.

“Oh fuck,” Tommy muttered, glancing at the battle raging around them. “*Fuck*. This is right before the nuke.”

Dream put a bit more weight on his sword, forcing Tommy to lean closer to counter it. “We have to get everyone out of here,” he whispered. “I know the nuke was the catalyst for Karl resetting the timeline, but—”

“—but fuck the consequences. We’re not letting anyone die.”

Dream nodded grimly, then forcibly shoved Tommy back and disengaged with a *shhhrk* of metal against metal. “EVERYBODY STOP!” he hollered.

Tommy joined in a second afterwards. “HEY! TUBS! SAM! STOP! STOP FIGHTING, WE’RE ALL ABOUT TO DIE!”

The battle came to a standstill as fighters on both sides looked towards the commotion. Tommy stepped up beside Dream, standing shoulder to shoulder with the man he’d been trying to kill only moments before.

“We gotta go,” he announced. “There’s a nuke coming and we’re all gonna die if we stay here.”

He received a lot of blank stares. “What?” Sapnap asked.

“There is a fucking *nuke*,” Tommy enunciated, “heading *straight for us*. We need to *get away* before it *gets here*.”

More uncertain, confused glances were exchanged amongst the crowd. “Tommy, what—” Tubbo began, eyes darting between Dream and Tommy. “Did Dream tell you a-a nuke was coming? I locked them up, nobody else knows the access codes—”

“No, Dream didn’t fucking tell me about the nuke. Just trust me, we *need to fucking go*.”

Nobody moved. There was confusion, yes, but also an underlying mistrust. They didn’t believe him. *Fuck*.

Dream twitched. To anyone else, it would've been a sign of agitation. To Tommy, it was Dream telling him they were taking too long and that he was about to go for Plan B.

Well. It wasn't like they had any other way to quickly get everyone away from the battlefield. Tommy tilted his head in subtle agreement.

Quicker than anyone could react, Dream grabbed Tommy’s wrist and *twisted*, forcing the teenager to drop his sword. In the next moment, he’d spun Tommy around and levered his sword under his chin.

“TOMMY!” half a dozen voices cried. Sam started forward, only to jerk to a stop when Dream tilted his blade in silent warning.

“Prisoner,” the warden growled.

Dream swallowed, eyes darting to and fro as he mentally prepared himself. His grip on Tommy’s wrist loosened. Tommy shifted, following Dream’s cue.

One breath. Two breaths. A blink.

The *instant* someone took a step towards them, Dream dispelled his sword, tossed Tommy over his shoulder, and fucking *sprinted* for the forest at the base of the mountains. A discordant symphony of shouts and snow crunching beneath boots followed, echoing off the evergreen branches around them. Tommy went ragdoll-limp, doing his best to make carrying him easier.

It didn’t help much. “Shit shit shit,” Dream panted, painfully aware of the burn crawling through his limbs. At this point in the timeline, he’d been nowhere *near* recovered from what had happened in the prison. Running was already difficult enough. Running with a *person slung over his shoulder*—he might as well have a broken leg, with how slow he was going.

Needless to say, the others were catching up fast.



“Lemme down!” Tommy shouted over the blood rushing in Dream’s ears. “You’re going too slow—just let me run with you, for fuck’s sake—”

Dream loosened his hold on Tommy’s legs. Tommy tensed and *rolled* with Dream’s next step, hitting the ground and coming out on his feet. Dream’s stride barely stuttered despite the sudden shift in weight—in fact, it sped up, now unburdened by another human being. Tommy fell into step beside him a moment later. They ignored the shouts behind them, focusing solely on their goal: getting as far away from the blast radius as possible.

A monotone drone rose in the distance, barely audible. If Tommy hadn’t been listening for it, he wouldn’t have heard it under the cacophony snapping at his heels. He sent a wild glance back, catching sight of shadowy figures flitting in and out of view. He had no idea how many people had followed them; he could only hope it had been enough.

Three seconds later, a *boom* rocked the forest. Tommy lurched sideways and tackled Dream just as a wave of heat rolled over them, carried on the wings of a scalding wind that stripped the leaves from the evergreens and swept the snow into convoluted waves. Screaming rose behind them—out of fear or pain, he couldn’t tell—as the earth trembled beneath them. Light, bright as the core of a dying star, pierced through the trees, forcing Tommy to shut his eyes.

For a short eternity, there was nothing but fire and wailing and the dull ache of the edges of Dream’s armor digging into Tommy’s ribs. Slowly, steadily, the light receded, returning to the level of natural daylight. The wind died down. The earth stopped shaking.

Beneath him, Dream shifted. “Is it over?” he croaked.

Tommy peeled his eyes open and glanced back. The trees around them were fairly intact, if now sporting fewer leaves. “I...think so?” he tried, sitting up and craning his head in an effort to glimpse any of the others. “There’s no ash, so we’re pretty far away from the blast point—”

“*WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT?!*” someone shrieked in the distance.

“—and they’re all alive enough to panic, so I think we did it.” Tommy huffed, his shoulders slumping. “We got them out of the death radius.”

Dream swallowed. “That’s...that’s good. We saved them. But—what do we do now?”

An excellent question, and one Tommy didn’t have an answer for. He did know, however, that they needed to get Dream away from the others before they regathered and tried to kill him again. “We split up. I’ll stay here and talk to them, you go—I dunno, build yourself a house or something. Stay away from the mainland for a while. I need some time to clear your name so they don’t go hunting for you again.”

Dream cracked a grin. “Okay, Tommy. Whatever you say, Tommy.”

Tommy, like the mature adult he was, flipped him off. Dream chuckled, but a racket from the direction of his pursuers forestalled any retort he would’ve made. Abandoning banter in favor

of a hasty flight, he merely patted Tommy on the arm, offered him a grateful smile, then turned tail and fled into the forest.

Now sitting alone in a patch of snowmelt and soggy grass, Tommy contemplated his next steps. He'd have to see who had died, if any, and revive them. Then there was also helping Karl with whatever the fuck was going on with him and the Inbetween, and...explaining everything to his friends. Because now that Dream was no longer around, it was all up to Tommy to explain how he'd known about the nuke. Which meant explaining the time loops.

“Well,” Tommy said to the air, “*fuck.*”

## Chapter End Notes

**viii.** Dream has a lovely time on vacation. Tommy has a not-so-lovely time trying to explain time loops to the rest of the server.



## ix.

### Chapter Summary

#### **CW: Spoilers for on temporizing**

After discovering who the third time traveler is and hearing all of his stories, Dream and Tommy use their newfound knowledge to mess with him—with decreasing subtlety.

### Chapter Notes

Why it isn't canon: the city of mizu episode (which occurs in the future) literally cannot happen given timeline mechanics, and I don't think glitterduo would treat Karl's Fun Little Situation as a joke

“Being sacrificed to a giant sentient egg really sucks, huh?”

Karl froze midstep. Dream glanced over quizzically, brow furrowed.

“What’s wrong?”

“What did you say?” Karl croaked, trying not to hyperventilate.

“Uhh...I was just saying that I don’t want to be sacrificed to the Crimson? You know? Because Bad and the others are always trying to sacrifice people to the Crimson?”

A complicated series of emotions played out across Karl’s face. “...Oh.”

“Yeah.” Dream squinted at him. “What did you think I said?”

“Nothing! Nothing. I was just...surprised.”

“By what?”

“I, uh, I thought you were—referencing something else.”

“What?”

“Um—er—nevermind. It was. Stupid.”

Dream stared at him for several unnerving seconds, then abruptly shrugged and turned away. “Okay. So as I was saying, the Crimson might be a big problem in the future—”

---

“Ranbob is a menace.”

Karl’s head snapped towards Tommy, who was glowering down at the chest in front of him.

“Wh-what?”

“I said he’s a menace. Fucker literally leaves me a chest of *dirt blocks*? The fuck am I going to do with *dirt blocks*?”

“Um,” said Karl. He surreptitiously peeked at the sign beside the chest.

*thanks for the cobblestone! <3*

*- ranboo*

“Are you...talking about Ranboo?”

Tommy sent him a look. “Yeah, that’s what I said? Who did you think I was talking about? Tubbo? Tubbo would give me *actual stuff*, not *dirt blocks*.”

“Ah, uh, um,” Karl said eloquently. Tommy rolled his eyes and waved him away.

---

“I miss Cattt,” Dream murmured.

Karl stopped in his tracks. He stared at Dream. The other two kept walking, not noticing Karl’s odd behavior.

“Who’s ‘Cattt’?” Sapnap asked, half-disbelieving and half-amused.

“Just an old friend.”

“You were friends with a guy named *Cattt*?”

“Prime, no. That was his nickname. He really liked cats.” Dream paused. “And you’re named *Sapnap*, you’ve got no right to judge.”

Sapnap grumbled but did not refute this point. George, meanwhile, snorted before glancing back and doing a double take when he saw Karl standing a ways behind. The other two, noticing this, turned as well. George frowned.

“Karl? Everything okay?”

“Y-yeah,” said Karl, eyes darting towards Dream and away again. “Uh. You said you...knew Cattt?”

Dream brightened. “You know him too?”

“Uh.” This felt like a trap. “I’ve. Met someone. Named that.”

“Huh,” Dream said. “Small world. Was it in the America server?”

“...No?”

“Oh, then it’s probably not him.” Dream snorted. “Two people named Cattt. Who would’ve thought?”

Karl nodded slowly, mind racing even as the conversation moved on.

Maybe it was Corpse’s descendent or something?

---

“Tommy, do you and Dream...know?”

Tommy squinted at him. “You’re gonna have to be a bit more specific, Karl. I know a *lot* of things.”

Karl took a deep breath, steeled himself, and asked, “Do you...know about the time travel?”

Tommy stared blankly at Karl. “The what?”

“Th-the time travel,” Karl repeated, now a little more uncertainly.

“What?”

“You know? Like, uh, traveling back in time?”

“What?”

Karl deflated. “Nevermind.”

“O...kay?” Tommy asked slowly. When Karl just looked morose, he awkwardly put a hand on his shoulder and patted twice. “You...good, man?”

“Yes,” said Karl. “Sorry, it’s just been a long...month.”

“You know you can talk to us about anything, right?”

Karl’s face went through a series of complicated emotions. “Yeah,” he finally said. “Thanks, Tommy.”

“Anytime.”

---

“Dream, not that I don’t appreciate this, but...why did you invite me for tea?”

Dream sent him a look. “Well *obviously*, it’s to celebrate.”

“...Celebrate what?”

Now Dream really did look offended. “It’s *British day!*”

“...That doesn’t exist?”

“It does now.”

“Neither of us are British?”

“All people celebrate British Day. Drink your tea.”

Karl took a sip from his teacup. The tea didn’t taste particularly British™, but then again, he had no idea what British tea was supposed to taste like as opposed to...non-British tea. “...What exactly is British day for?”

“For pretending we’re all British, what else?” Dream bit into his crumpet, chewed thoughtfully, then said, “Also, when were you going to tell me you could time travel?”

Karl choked on his tea.

## X.

### Chapter Summary

**TW: loop-typical suicide, discussion of passive suicidal ideation—not treated with the gravity they deserve due to looping mechanics**

After five loops spent in the prison, Dream wakes up to find himself in a new loop after the final confrontation—about to be taken back to the prison.

AKA an alternative to the first few loops after Tommy found out about Dream being tortured, and before Tommy figured out how to break him out.

### Chapter Notes

Why it isn't canon: This was from the initial draft of Dream's redemption arc, and was too Dream-sympathetic to fit into the final version.

(Yes, the next ot chapter is still in the works. I'm trying to tide over with on diverging content during the waits. Promise the next on diverging loop will be funnier!)

Five loops. Five loops of dripping obsidian walls and lava. Five loops of raw potatoes and Quackity's 'visits' and empty, terrible *loneliness*.

When Dream opened his eyes to a new loop, he was standing on a moving surface. A platform. A platform that was slowly rising upwards. Sam and Sapnap stood on either side of him, weapons in hand.

He was getting taken back to the prison.

He couldn't go back to the prison. He couldn't go back to the prison, because—to be offered a taste of freedom, only for it to be ripped away—

He didn't know if he could handle it.

Below him, the crowd was silent, watching as he was led away. Tommy, half-leaning on Tubbo, had stopped in front of the portal and turned back to look at him.

Their eyes met. Tommy stiffened in realization, eyes widening. He took an aborted half-step away from Tubbo, reaching out like he could physically stop Dream.

It didn't matter. Things would reset in the next loop anyways.

Dream wrenched free from Sam's grasp and threw himself off the platform.

---

It said a lot about the loops that Tommy's first thought when Dream jumped was *ah shit, here we go again*.

His second thought was to cover Tubbo's eyes, which he did just as a sickening crack echoed through the room. Someone let out a choked cry and fell silent, the echoes of their voice ringing through the deafening silence. The platform began to descend, both Sam and Sapnap calling frantically downwards, unable to see what had happened.

"Uh," Tommy croaked, his eyes fixed on the body. Tubbo tried to pry his hands away, but Tommy's grip remained firm. "He's uh, he's very dead."

Tubbo went still, then redoubled his efforts to pry Tommy's hands from his eyes. "Let go," he snapped. "I've seen worse!"

"Yeah, I... I don't think you want to see this one."

Tubbo huffed and finally managed to throw his hands off. Then he caught sight of Dream and paled. "Oh. Ohhhh."

Tommy swallowed. "Yeah."

"I-I think I want to go now," Tubbo said. He turned towards the portal. "Let's go, yeah?"

Tommy didn't want to go. Dream's ghost would be reforming here soon, and Tommy didn't want him to wake up in a room full of people who'd been clamoring for his death literal moments before.

On the other hand, the edges of Tubbo's mask were beginning to crack. Tommy could see the signs—the tightly-clenched jaw, the waver at the edges of his smile, the glazed sheen over his eyes—and even if Tubbo didn't remember this next loop, Tommy *knew* how emotionally taxing the aftermath of the final confrontation had been. Tubbo needed support right now, and it would be a cold day in the Nether before Tommy refused to give it.

"Okay," he said, reaching down and grabbing Tubbo's hand. Tubbo's smile became a tad more genuine. He tugged Tommy into the portal, and Tommy followed without resistance.

As the purple light washed over him, Tommy sent a silent apology to Dream. He'd catch up with the ghost as soon as he could.

---



"Never do that again," Tommy hissed.

Dream blinked at him. *"Uh, hello to you too."*

"I'm serious," Tommy snapped. "You can't—don't—just off yourself!"

*"I thought you were Tommy,"* the ghost quipped. *"And why not? I'll be alive again next loop."* His smile faded. *"Besides, I'd rather die than go back to the Vault at this point."*

"Okay, yeah, sure, you'll be alive again next loop, but—*fuck*, you can't just—kill yourself to escape the consequences!"

Something dark and ugly flashed across Dream's face. *"...I think I've more than faced the consequences at this point."*

Tommy reviewed his statement and winced when he realized how it might've come off. "I—fuck, that wasn't what I meant. It's just—Dream, it isn't—*healthy*, okay? We probably have to spend eternity here if we don't figure shit out, and it'd be nicer if we were sane enough to enjoy it."

*"Nothing about these loops are healthy,"* the ghost said flatly.

"Then—think about your friends," Tommy tried.

*"What friends? Everyone on the server hates me."*

"Punz. Gogy. Fuck, even Technoblade—whatever he is to you—they care, damnit—"

*I care too*, he didn't say.

*"They won't remember anything next loop."* All humor was gone from Dream's voice now, leaving only exhaustion. *"I won't go back to the prison, Tommy. This was the only way out."*

"Then we'll figure out a way to break into the prison," Tommy snapped. "Next loop this happens, I'll recruit Technoblade or someone else to break you out. We can replicate what he does."

Dream looked doubtful. Tommy ran a hand through his hair, then snapped his fingers. "Okay, y'know what? I'm adding something else to our agreement."

*"Wha—you can't just—"*

"I can and I will, bitch. No...no suicide. Might not physically affect us, but we don't know how long we're gonna be stuck here and we need to have... *decent* mental health if we're gonna survive."

Dream narrowed his eyes. *"...I'll agree on two conditions. First, you figure out how to break me out of the Vault."*

"Was already planning to."

The ghost nodded. *"Okay. Okay, and..."* he took a deep breath, despite not needing to breathe. *"...and if you're dying and capable of stopping it, but you...don't. That's allowed."*

Tommy squinted. "...That's still kinda...suicide, innit?"

Dream didn't meet his gaze. *"Yes."*

"I..." Tommy chewed on the inside of his cheek, gaze sliding sideways. "I don't like it," he admitted. "But...but if that...yeah. If that's—happening to you. In prison. Yeah." He straightened. "But I'll try to break you out before it gets to that. Try to make it—last resort, you know?"

Dream nodded. *"Alright, I'll try. And uh. Thanks. For, um, trying to preserve my sanity."*

Tommy shrugged. "Time loops are pretty sucky to deal with alone. I need you in one piece."

*"Aw, you care!"*

"I *will* find a way to exorcize you, bastard. Don't test me."

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